Purple — wondering is over!

STOMACH these facts first about Deep Purple. They've just completed yet another incredibly successful tour of Japan and America. Their album, Machine Head is now into its 71st week in the US album charts and still finds a place in the 30. There's been two million dollar's worth of business in that album alone.

Deep purple got a gold for Who Do We Think We Are and another gold disc for Made In Japan. Deep Purple fans know these facts and perhaps other things have been on their minds of late. In July they accepted Glenn Hughes into the group now they've been wondering who will replace the seemingly irreplaceable Ian Gillan, Purple's lead singer and Jesus Christ of the record Jesus Christ Superstar.

The answer was given last Thursday at Clearwell Castle, somewhere near Chepstow.

Purple records hired a coach and sent down to the Welsh border a bevy of journalists and photographers. They should have played Dusty Springfield's disc, Whose It Going To Be, as the coach roared its way through our delightfully boring motorway from London to South Wales.

Speculation raged amongst the brave forecasters. Paul Rogers from Free seemed an obvious one and with his troubles in Africa and group departures the unkind muttered, Paul McCartney.

Other tips included Grace Slick from Jefferson Airplane, Cliff Richard, Johnny Cash and Steve Priest. Naturally it was a merry name, the new singer for Deep Purple. After all how do you really replace someone like Ian Gillan, a guy who has welded so well his vocal work into the musical aspirations of the group?

The current music scene isn't exactly full of talent and dissatisfied lead singers from existing and successful groups aren't two a penny. The coach hadn't gone more than twenty miles before the subject was left in abeyance.

Woken from food and drink slumbers journalists and photographers stepped gingerly into the fresh air of Clearwell Castle. The moment of revelation had come and in a twinkling of an eye the full group were out on the lawn facing the main Castle entrance and people looked.

"Arthur Brown," someone muttered beside me but he was being flippant and I won't tell you his pop paper. The new member was named as David Coverdale. No, you've not heard of him, at least unless you attended the Red Lodge Social Clubman, their children's Boxing Day party in 1967 or saw him with the Skyliners at Redcar Jazz club a little later and gigs since in the Redcar area.

David Coverdale, born September 22, 1951, father's name, Thomas Joseph and mother, Winifred May, was until a few weeks back an assistant in a clothing boutique. He had one guitar bought by his mother for less than £30. He still plays it.

The new member is good looking, pretty confident for one so young in the pop scene. He talked about his meteoric rise. Take one simple fact: He usually plays in-front of a hundred or so. In a few months time with Purple and in California he's likely to get 250,000 people. Some change.

"I met Deep Purple around three years ago. Then I was with a band called Government. Purple were top billers. You have to jump time now and get to a month ago. I learnt that Ian was leaving.

Someone came into the shop and said why didn't I have a go for the group. He was being funny but someone else said the same and more seriously. So I did.

"I was auditioned and there were tapes sent. Mine were pretty bad. At one point they got the number down to four. "When I made the tape I had had too much drink. I was amazed to find they were liked. It appeared the group liked little bits here and there which suggested I could fit in with their sound.

"The finale came with an audition at the Scorpio studios. It was meant to last three hours but went on for seven. At the end they said they would call me and we've all heard that remark I'm sure.

They did ring and said it was mine. "Now we're here at the Castle getting things together in the peace and quiet and having a great time. Things have been going so well. The group have been incredibly kind. It's been so easy to fit in with them. Glenn and myself are to share the vocals. You know we've hit if off in tremendous fashion. It's all slightly unbelievable.

"I've had to adapt my life suddenly. When you get used to regular hours it's not too easy to fit into one where you may work right through the night and have breakfast at two in the afternoon. It's certainly been surprising some of the visitors to the castle, I can TELL YOU!

"I think in a way it's been a good thing that I've not gone and listened to hours of Ian. I have to do my thing. Music-wise, I've always admired someone like Richie Blackmore, he's the 'guvernor' to me.

"Though I've not tried to copy Ian we will be continuing with a few of the Purple hit numbers, one's like Smoke On The Water, Spurs Trecking and Highway Star. I like to bop about on stage so there will be change from Ian who liked to be more-or-less static I believe.

"Now with the group settled it's down to a new album and some live gigs not too distant. Life is good these days, just keep saying it!"

So the new singer is David Coverdale. Musically it seems to give an exciting future for Deep Purple. One of its fortes has been the musical chasing between Jon Lord and Richie Blackmore.

Vocally the same thing looks likely between Glenn Hughes and David. It should make for even greater days for Deep Purpl.

By Tony Jasper